

Conversations With Plants

The Path Back to Nature



Nikki Darrell

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AEON

Aeon Books Ltd
12 New College Parade
Finchley Road
London NW3 5EP

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A C.I.P. for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-13: 978-1-91159-764-3

Typeset by Medlar Publishing Solutions Pvt Ltd, India
Printed in Great Britain

www.aeonbooks.co.uk

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INTRODUCTION

Setting some context

We have arrived in the twenty-first century with a long story of how we got here. In fact, there are many stories of how we got here since many people have been involved in the journey and its evolution up to this point. It is very important to realise that although these stories have some similarities, there are also important factors in each which we need to be informed of to get a fuller picture of the panoramic view. In the English speaking world, we often listen to a very selective version of the stories of how we got here, excluding the voices of the women, the peasants, the people of colour and other marginalised groups; it is time for us to hear some of the untold aspects the relationship between plants and people.

We can do this by reaching further into the unwritten traditions; the family and rural traditions. They are not gone; they are just not written down. And they are eroded in some places but not others.

When I did my formal training as a herbalist, there were no such things as degrees or masters in herbal medicine. I graduated the year before degrees came into being. At the same time as attending the School of Phytotherapy, I worked with a third generation herbalist, and I had also spent nearly 20 years in informal studies; each strand of learning brought its own gifts, insights and knowledge.

Although science has informed our practice beneficially in some ways, it has become a rather despotic force, rather than a tool. Academia is failing us more and more. I left the world of academia and research in the mid-1980s when Margaret Thatcher and others of the capitalist corporate model dictated that all research must have corporate funding, and yield products. Science itself has become infected by corporate capitalism and is no longer objective, neutral or impartial; it has become biased in a specific direction that is fundamentally at odds with the true nature of plant medicine.

Plants were here before people, we have co-evolved with the plants, and they collaborated with the rest of Nature in our evolution; it was the mosses that first emerged from the oceans and made air breathable for land animals and plants and started the process of creating soil. We are complex beings and so are the plants and our complexities complement each other.

Our religious culture places humans in dominion over Nature; actually, this is a false idea. Nature collaborated to evolve the human species to take care and serve and carry out a range of other ecological functions as will be elucidated during our explorations. It is a worthwhile question to meditate upon ... what are the ecological functions of the human species? This shift towards dominion only happened about 10,000 years ago, a brief time span, when hierarchy and dominator models replaced the egalitarian community-based culture that was spread across the globe. Although some argue that the Golden Age never existed, there is plenty of evidence to show that it did in the times of the mound people. The political and philosophical culture of the West became one of colonialism, plunder, extraction, consumerism, technology, privilege and kyriarchy.

Previously, people worked with the plants around them. There were trade routes, exchanges of ideas and plants moved around the world with the people, joining new communities. For the ordinary people, the plants that they used were the ones that they could grow in their own area, along with small amounts of exotic spices and so forth. Most medicines were prepared at home or in local communities, and people showed a deep understanding of how to do this for the best benefit. They did not prepare many tinctures but made all manner of elegant preparations from the plants. Then the enclosures happened, and people were moved off the land and forgot those relationships. The Elite was created.

What has this all got to do with where we are today? We are at a crisis point where plant medicine holds the potential to heal many ills not just of the people but also of ecosystems and the Earth itself. But only if we remember who we are.

So, from the perspective of plants and the ordinary grassroots people there are stories that need to be heard, the stories about how people helped to create the ecosystems, working with the trees and the plants; the Kayapo, the Kogi, the walnut forests, the Amazonian forests, even the oak forests of the Western European Isles and France, the grasslands and prairies. Humans, the other animals, the plants, insects and fungi worked together. People moved freely without borders. Some settled and worked with the land around them, the land they belonged to rather than had dominion over, and they did this sustainably, not worshipping Nature but knowing they were of the natural world, not separate. The dark myth of separation has caused great wounding to the point where we have fallen into even viewing our own bodies (the piece of earth that we are) as a machine in a mechanomorphic world view overly dominated by the left neo-cortex view of the world as lifeless.

Vitality and vitalism have been written out of the current medical epistemology so that we forget that we are indeed living beings with an ability to heal ourselves and make the land around us healthy.

We are at a crucial point where we can continue to consume, pillage and plunder and view the rest of Nature as resources and commodities for us to take, or we can come back to our senses, slow down and realise that we are at present on a pathological path that will lead to declining health for ourselves and our kin before we extinct ourselves; we can come back to ourselves and remember how to make it beautiful. We can return to sanity and clarity.

It's time to snatch our futures back from the experts. Time to ask, in ordinary language, the public question, and to demand, in ordinary language, the public answer.

Arundhati Roy (The End of Imagination, p. 188)

We need to move from dominator models to community and partnership, letting go of privilege and entitlement and seeing that there is an elegant sufficiency for all and that there are much healthier possibilities.

I came to the vocation of being a plant medicine person because the plants called me. The plants are so incredibly generous and provide so

much for us. They have been objectified for hundreds of years, and it is wonderful to now see science validating what authentic people have always known—plants are sentient and conscious. They are intelligent and hold great wisdom. We are not the only species with consciousness, morality, intelligence and the ability to communicate. So now it is time to listen to the green ones and work with them, to become biocentric, ecocentric and nurture the biophilia we are born with, to engender biognosis and learn what we really were evolved to be; not rapists and vandals but in service to our community.